



Northwestern Hawaiian Islands



Habitats

Coral reefs
Seamounts
Banks
Shoals
Atolls

Key Species

Monk Seal
Green Sea Turtle
Black Coral
Spiny Lobster
Butterfly Fish
Laysan Albatross

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) contain seventy percent of the United States' coral reefs and over 7,000 marine species, half of which are unique to the Hawaiian Islands. The area is critical habitat for many endangered and threatened species including the monk seal and the green sea turtle. NWHI are the largest conservation area in the U.S. and the second largest on earth with the first largest being the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

NWHI Coral Reef Reserve

Executive Order 13178 established the Reserve in December 2000 for the long-term conservation and protection of the coral reef ecosystem, marine species and other marine resources. The level of protection within the reserve varies. Wildlife refuges, like the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, serve to protect the areas through sustainable measures. Reserve preservation areas prohibit all consumptive uses in particular areas of the reserve and play an integral role in the conservation and protection of the region.

Sanctuary Designation

The National Marine Sanctuary Program has begun the process to determine if it is appropriate to designate the reserve as a national marine sanctuary under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. Initial steps involve working with a reserve advisory council, composed of local community members, to develop vision, goals, and objectives for the sanctuary, holding public scoping meetings to elicit comments and developing assessments of the area in consideration.

Location

The water and islands in the Northwestern part of the Hawaiian Islands

Protected Area
99,500-square nautical miles

Designation
January 2001 (Reserve) proposed for sanctuary status

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Above: reef fish abound in remote NWHI waters; left to right: endangered Hawaiian monk seal; red pencil urchin; table corals

